PROPOSED BUILDING ARTIFICERS' PROVIDENT SOCIETY.

The scheme of the Building Artificers' Provident and Benevolent Society, propounded by the professor of architecture, and so ably advocated by yourself on the 15th ult., is already justified in every man's breast; but we want such statistics and practical views as shall no less justify it to his head, and satisfy those of your readers who regard it rather as a *beau ideal* than an attainable good, and take fright at its apparent magnitude and difficulty. I am glad to find that your invitations to correspondents on this subject have not been in vain, though the valuable letter of Mr. Grant on the 29th ult., so confirmatory of the success of deferred annuities, is the only one which has appeared in your columns. The following, gathered from the "Report on the Friendly Societies' Bill," by a committee of the House last year, and other sources, may be acceptable to your readers.

The Architects' and Builders' Insurance Society estimates the number of persons connected with building, at 800,000 throughout the United Kingdom. The Builders' Benevolent Society estimate those in and about the metropolis at 300,000; probably including families also. The "Directory" gives us 785 capitalist builders in London, 678 architects and surveyors; 161 civil engineers, and 245 mechanical engineers. Such is the host on which we have to operate, and such the materials, in knowledge, skill, influence, and numbers.

The probable success of such a scheme may be illustrated by that of Mr. Biers, who, with able seconds, in less than two years, has created the Builders' Benevolent Society; at this moment endowed with 1,200*l.* stock, and in November to award five annual pensions, amounting to 120*l.* At their first dinner the sum of 600*l.* was raised.

A few weeks ago 11,000*l.* were raised by a bazaar at Liverpool, in three days, for the relief of a hospital. The annual dinners at Freemasons'-hall, for the numberless charities meeting there during the year, raise an astonishing revenue. To a justifiable claim, fairly put forth, John Bull is ever ready to yield, and "his hand, open as day to melting charity," willingly pours forth its abundance.

How entirely this claim is justified, appears from the "evidence" that there are from 13,000 to 14,000 friendly societies, producing about 6,000,000*l.* annually; and by so much, in consequence, diminishing the poor's-rates. Of this great number it is melancholy to be assured by the first actuaries of the country, "that the majority are insolvent," "that the clubs throughout the country are almost universally broken up," "that nothing can save the old societies," "that this deplorable state of things has arisen from ill constructed tables;"—"from peculation which often *the law cannot touch*;" from strikes and trades unions in which artificers have been tyrannically compelled to subscribe 2*s.* 6*d.* per week: the loss to the artificers in Liverpool alone, during eighteen weeks' turn out, in 1833; (on the respectable authority of Mr. Holmes) amounted to 45,000*l.*;—"from competition of benefit societies," unauthorized by opinions of actuaries or Government confirmation, and got up by interested publicans, who have in some cases three and four under their direction;—a fertile source of failure. In fact, we scarcely meet an artificer of sixty years old who has not for many years paid contributions for benefits which he ought now in his age to enjoy, but which have lamentably disappeared; leaving him to the pawnbroker for a time, and, lastly, to the workhouse.

Amongst the many reasons for this deplorable state of clubs, is undoubtedly the fact, that superiors, master builders, and architects, and manufacturers generally, have not taken that interest in the industrial classes under their guidance, which the clergy and country gentlemen have done, amongst the rural population, where there are members, and conductors, and even insurers and *honorary members*, "sufficient to save them in some cases from insolvency."

Thus deserted by their natural advisers and protectors, and cheated of their hard-earned savings, by interested and knavish delusions, we are prepared for the evidence, "that the working classes are sensible of the great disadvantage the breaking up of these clubs is to them;" that "there is a strong feeling amongst the working classes to enter sound societies;" "recklessness of the people produced by so many friendly societies breaking up," &c. &c.

Can we be surprised or indignant at the strikes, the unions, the menaces, the incendiarism (which has brought fire-proof shops so much into fashion, in Liverpool, particularly), which such a state of things has produced? or, at that last sad symptom of alienation and sullen disloyalty, in the declaration of some workmen in 1848, on the memorable 10th of April, "that they should take neither side, that they would defend their own premises and tools, but use no active exertions in support of order." Such a neutrality explains itself, for "he that is not with us, is against us."

But, Mr. Editor, it is in the perfect conformity of interest and duty (that essential condition of success), that I am most sanguine as to this scheme; for, first, the builders, as the natural protectors, the fathers and advisers of the artificer, the very keys of the undertaking, would find in it their immediate advantage. Their personal exertions, and their annual subscriptions in its favour (well known), would present at once a full and conclusive recommendation with the operative—a new means of patronage, and a material alleviation to their own pockets, from all those calls which casualties, ill-health, and long services, accumulate on an old and worthy firm. And though, from the liberality of builders,—a Peto, and others whom we could name amongst the fortunate builder capitalists—the real staple support of the scheme would be derived, let them never forget that, alone and unassociated with the architect and engineer—the public man—the artificer himself, and open reports and books, and audited accounts, their benevolence would fall to the ground, from the jealousy of the operative, and his suspicion of some sinister motive in the master builder. In Liverpool, from this very cause, a most beneficial scheme in their favour totally failed.

The advantages to the architect and engineer, though of an honorary character purely, are not the less real in respect of their interests; their authority and influence would be asserted and exercised; the artificer would acknowledge their disinterested and mediatorial exertions, as a sort of nobility in the art of building. They would dignify and exalt the workman by association with him; but especially they would see the shrewd advantage of addressing and engaging the highest ranks and the most conspicuous public spirits of the day in favour of so formidable and meritorious a class as the building artificers. The *entrée* alone to these higher powers would always be found a sufficient motive for their busy exertions in favour of the society, and offers them the ornament of benevolence in addition to their other claims on the regard and estimation of the great. Thus, through a better feeling infused amongst the rich, a better feeling would gradually spread amongst the poor, and restore our cankered society to a more hopeful and more natural state.

Thirdly, the advantages to the workman need no comment; his savings would be secured, by following good counsel of an established and responsible committee and office of agency, to embark either in deferred annuities, or other beneficial means supplied by Government, or even the clubs of acknowledged solvency,—the motto of the society being, "Help yourselves, and God will help you."

The benefit fund raised by at least 1,000 contributors of a shilling to a pound, and as much more as the conscience and the published returns of the subscribers would suggest, would defray all expenses, and save many a poor family from destitution. The labourer would embrace a society so warranted by public and responsible character, and so exempt from the wretched delusion of which he has hitherto been the unhappy and melancholy victim: assured of the good feelings and honest counsel of his betters, he would cease to wage that futile and desolating war against capital, in which he has been heretofore so vainly engaged;—a more cheering prospect of the future would open to his thrift, and thence every virtue, domestic, public, and social, would abundantly flow, for the good of the country as well as himself and family.

We do not dream of impracticable benevolence. The laws of social and political economy are as immutable as those of the physical sciences. Louis Blanc can no more alter them than he can the law of gravitation. The remuneration of capital, intellect, and manual labour, settle themselves, and will endure no interference, whether caused by interested or benevolent motives. The present scheme presents no such attempt, it does not profess to give men more than a market price for their labour, nor more in sickness than their own contributions can supply, nor larger interest for their savings than Government security and provident Acts of Parliament can afford,—but it calls upon us to exercise and to understand those true principles of communism by which the Pharisee in the Temple, and Zaccheus in the sycamore tree, recommended themselves to the favour of the Almighty—the only means by which we can secure his favour, and avert that evil day which will surely fall upon a country—

"Where wealth accumulates, and hearts decay."

If, as Mr. Macaulay has shown, the condition of the working-classes has greatly improved in the last 200 years in this country (as M. Thiers has also done in respect of France), it is no less certain that capital, and master builders, and manufacturers have risen into enormous power and wealth. Also the use which the humbler classes have made of these advantages in their unassisted and invaluable mechanics' institutes, headed by the generous Birkbeck and others, points to a noble issue of their improved condition; and no less their use of savings banks, and even clubs, however delusive they have often turned out. Shall we not aid these worthy efforts, to show an equally worthy use of our improved condition? or shall we lend a sullen and ungenerous attention to these fair claims on our aid and exertions?

It gave me pleasure to learn that the Builders' Society of London (the Builders' Union as you have fairly termed it) has a real and earnest intention to promote some such measure as the Building Artificers' Provident and Benevolent Society. Pray, Mr. Editor, urge them to advance it by some readier means than their monthly gatherings alone. They should be reminded that while the Builders' Union is dissolved at Liverpool, as temporary only, and maintained during the strike, and no longer, theirs *is permanently sitting in London*; and unless some general and generous good is to come out of this *permanent sitting*, the public and capitalist patrons will begin to suspect combination and monopoly in the market, as much, or more formidable amongst them, than amongst their humbler brethren.

Trusting that you will excuse so long a justification of my adherence to the Building Artificers' Provident and Benevolent Society, and wishing all success to your spirited and generous furtherance of the scheme, I remain, with gratitude and respect, your faithful friend and fellow-labourer,

A Freemason.

AMENDMENT OF THE INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

Your remarks, Mr. Editor, in the leading article of The Builder for the 21st of July, headed as a few words to the council, upon the closing meeting of the session, are well worthy their notice. There and elsewhere I am glad to see you condemn, *in toto*, the "narrow, injurious, and impolitic regulation," which keeps men who measure artificers' works for builders from becoming members of their body. These remarks, if unheeded by the council, will have their full weight with the other members. Pray, do not give up this subject.

W. X. W.

Several other correspondents have addressed us on the same point. They may rest assured that we shall not be inattentive to the report of the council, to whom the question was referred, when it is made. Our views are unchanged, and we sincerely hope that the council will recommend the omission of the illiberal and unwise disqualification in question. We are bound to say that, knowing the feeling of some members of the present council, we are not very sanguine as to the desired result. In the event of the council declaring against the alteration, it will be for the body of the members to express their opinion upon

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